

JC2033 AND THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT

Ten years of collaboration

By Martin Hoegger

I started working with the JC2033 initiative in September 2016. As a pastor of the Reformed Church in Switzerland - with several ecumenical experiences - I was asked to establish relations with the member churches of the World Council of Churches and with the Catholic Church. Right from the start I contacted the Focolare Movement, with which I have been linked since 1994. This broad-based movement lives a "spirituality of unity" (or communion) centred on the "Testament of Jesus", namely his prayer for unity before his passion: "*That they may all be one*"! (John 17:21).

The spirituality of this movement is in line with the values of JC2033, where unity is at the heart of the approach. The emphasis placed by the Focolare on the presence of the Risen Christ in the midst of his people was also immediately appealing.

It therefore seemed to me that the members of Focolari would be interested in our approach of visiting churches, communities, and movements to invite them to reflect on the Jubilee of 2000 years since the resurrection of Christ in 2033.

After ten years of collaboration and countless visits, I think our Focolare friends have become valuable partners on this 'pilgrimage of reconciliation' preparing for the Jubilee celebrations. Here are a few chronicles of these visits, in chronological or thematic order and in different cities.

Rome: welcome and encouragement



Maria Wienken and Diego Goller, co-directors of the Centro Uno, with Martin Hoegger, Olivier Fleury and Jason Hollinger (JC2033)

The first meeting between people involved in JC2033 and leaders of the Focolare Movement took place in Grottaferrata, a town high above Rome. Olivier Fleury, President of JC2033 (and a Pentecostal pastor), Jason Hollinger, Head of Communications, and I visited the *Centro Uno* at the beginning of November 2016, the day before Olivier was granted a private audience with Pope Francis.

We are welcomed by the staff of this international centre for relations with the various Churches, and in particular by Maria Wienken and Diego Goller, its co-directors.

We promised to keep in touch with each other, through the meetings of *"Together for Europe"*, to which JC2033 has been invited... At the end of this week, I took part in a meeting of this "movement of movements" in Rome, as a member of its Swiss committee.

I remember Maria and Diego encouraging me to take part in JC2033, particularly by living and sharing the spirituality of communion. I'd like to thank them very much for that.

Watch the video of Maria Wienken talking about JC2033: <https://www.jc2033.world/it>

Visits to Rome: <https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/223-rome-2016>

Lebanon: the daily resurrection



A month later, at the beginning of December 2016, Dany El Obeid, a professor at the American University of Beirut and head of the World Student Christian Federation in the Middle East, took us to Aïn Aar, the centre of the Focolare movement, in the hills above Beirut.

We are welcomed by the movement's

ecumenical committee in Lebanon.

"Our way of life is to live the Gospel and seek what unites us. If we start with the 'golden rule' that Jesus gave us - 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you' - we find that prejudices fall away," says Maria, the centre's manager.

This is how around a hundred Muslim families came to the centre for a month during the 2006 war. Bonds were forged, and yesterday they spent a day together to remember.

"We need to start preparing now for this event in our daily lives by living the resurrection," says Garo Amidi, a "volunteer" and member of the Armenian Orthodox Church.

Sharing the vision for 2033 elicits a great response: *"For us, unity through the crucified and risen Jesus is truly the synthesis of the Gospel,"* says one participant. *"We need to start preparing for this event now in our daily lives by living the resurrection."*

Another said: *"Persecuted Christians experience the resurrection daily. Without it, they would not survive. They bring life back to its essentials"*. This festive and joyous occasion ended with a sumptuous Lebanese buffet topped off with the sweets of "Santa Barbara", remembering the martyr celebrated the previous day.

About visits to Lebanon: <https://www.jc2033.world/fr/news/blog/163-chroniques-libanaises.html>

Vienna: A participatory process

In November 2017, on the outskirts of Vienna, we met the managers of the "DACH" (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) Zone Centre, who welcomed us in a former shoe factory that had been converted into a life centre.

Peter Forst, who is responsible for the German-speaking countries, says that he can identify with the various points in the "DNA" of JC2033 (Unity, Witness and Celebration), particularly unity: *"If the movements get together, we can reach the whole people of God. Each movement has a charism"*. He encourages us to give a place to the various forms of prayer. It would not be good for one tradition to dominate over the others.

Johannes Vetter quotes Pope Francis, who believes that it is important to launch participatory processes in order to reach everyone. He sees the JC2033 project as a significant example of this process.

As for Dirk Kennis, he encourages us to build a network of personal relationships: "the future of Christianity lies in encounters, within the people of God and between leaders".

Visits to Vienna: <https://www.jc2033.world/fr/news/blog/161-vienna.html>



Brussels: "Going out together"



In May 2017, we travelled to Belgium. Our visits ended with a visit to the "Mariapoli" in Rotselaar, near Brussels. This meeting place is part of a small industrial cluster with seven companies that adhere to the "economy of communion".

The two managers spoke to us the day after a family day. *"We need to get a lot of young people involved. The resurrection is the central event for humanity. What happens after death? Nothingness? It's a question we all ask ourselves. The answer*

of Jesus' resurrection must be brought to everyone", exclaimed Colette Letolguenec on discovering the project.

"Unity is a critical pillar. A key element is to bring the networks together", adds Ton Jongstra, who recommends presenting this project to *"Together for Europe"*, the network of communities and movements I mentioned earlier.

As C. Letolguenec had just been on an ecumenical trip with members of the Brussels Orthodox Church, so we told her about our visit to Archbishop Athenogoras, the Orthodox Archbishop of Benelux. She was touched that he spoke of the need to "get out". Pope Francis repeats it over and over again: Christians must go out to meet suffering humanity. *"May 2033 be a time when we can go out together to proclaim the resurrection with our lives and love in action!"*

Nikita Skatchoff, a priest linked to the Focolare Movement, recommends working with Catholic movements and visiting their leaders. He makes no secret of his enthusiasm: *"JC2033 is a movement that brings people together. There is extraordinary strength in unity. But it's only the presence of Christ among us that makes it possible and makes every action fruitful. That's why we need to commit ourselves to each other"*.

About visits to Belgium: <https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/171-belgium>

Jerusalem: Living the resurrection now

Of course, we had to visit the city where it all began, nearly 2000 years ago. Over the course of a week in September 2017, Olivier, Pastor *Shafique Keshavjee* and I visited around twenty church leaders and various movements. A real marathon!

In the Talpiot neighbourhood, around fifteen members of the various Focolare groups, men and women, from the East and West Jerusalem communities, as well as from Bethlehem, welcome us for lunch. Some have been here for a short time, others for 40 years. They come from all four continents and seek to build relationships with all communities, whether Christian, Jewish or Muslim.

In front of the kindness and fraternity of this group, Olivier feels confident to share the call he received in Australia ten years ago. It was the turning point in his life, when he realised that Christ was calling him to invite the Churches to unite preparing for the 2000 years of his resurrection.



Here are a few reactions:
Dominique, from Slovakia:
"I'm a little tired of the ecumenical movement, but what you say awakens a hope in me: to gather around the Risen Christ, the heart of our faith".

Belin, from the Philippines, says: *"Our contribution will be to live the resurrection in our daily lives. We can all start on the road to 2033 now"*.

Angela, from Spain: *"This idea is astonishing, but it's what the world needs, especially*

here in Jerusalem".

Alessandra, from Brazil: *"When Jesus says 'that all may be one', it starts with Christians. I like the fact that this project is taking time because it's necessary to prepare people from the inside. It's the ideas that seem crazy that change the world"*.

Visits to Jerusalem: <https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/169-jerusalem>

Jerusalem, January 2023 - Involving the grassroots

During the week of prayer for Christian unity, we shared a meal in a restaurant in the Christian quarter of the Old City with **Dominik Berberich** and **Claudio Maina**, two members of the Focolare community in Jerusalem. This is not the first time we have met them and talked to them about JC2033, as we spent an evening with them and about ten other members of this broad-based movement during our first visit to Jerusalem in 2017.

On the idea of marking the beginning of the decade of the resurrection, Dominik warns us that in Jerusalem there is a need for both caution and perseverance. On the other hand, it is important to be aware that the idea of praying together is problematic for some churches and perhaps it would be better to find other ways to celebrate our common faith in the Resurrection of Christ

For Claudio, the challenge is to involve local Christians at the grassroots level, not just church leaders. This requires time and taking the right steps with the right people. For him, Easter 2023 is premature. We have to think about 2025, for the same reasons that Father Frans Bouwen gave us, namely the fact that in that year the date of Easter is common to all the churches. The year 2024 is not suitable because there is more than a month's difference between the Western and Orthodox Easter.

However, he thinks that organizing a meeting during Easter week is almost impossible. Each church

has a very dense program of celebrations. As Yusef Daher, the person in charge of the liaison office with the World Council of Churches in Jerusalem, whom we met in the morning, he also thinks that the Lenten season would be the most suitable.



From left to right : Dominik Berberich, Olivier Fleury, Chantal and Martin Hoegger, in front of the "Stairs of Unity" (The "Scaletta"), where the movement of Focolari plans to build a center. Picture taken during the "Emmaus pilgrimage" in April 2023

On the week of prayer of Christian unity in Jerusalem in 2023:

<https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/659-chronicles-of-the-week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-in-jerusalem>

Geneva: "Giving a decisive sign of unity"

At a meeting organised with the World Council of Churches to mark the 10^e anniversary of Chiara Lubich's "birth in heaven" in March 2018, Jèsus Moran, co-president of the Focolare, was invited to give a reflection on ecumenism.

At the end of the meeting, I was invited by the Geneva community to share a meal. I was able to present the JC2033 project to J. Moran. He

listened attentively and as I spoke to him, I could feel his interest growing: *"The year 2033 will be a unique opportunity for the churches to give a decisive sign of unity together"*, he said.



Philippines, "Everyone is a candidate for unity"

We met the people in charge of Ecumenism of the Focolare movement of the Philippines, in May 2018. It is precisely the commitment by JC2033 to unity that touches Edith de Jesus Scandia and William Pilarta: *"Everyone is a candidate for unity"*, they told Olivier. This summer, they are expecting more than ten thousand young people from different backgrounds for the "Genfest". They also believe that the celebration of 500 years of the arrival of Christianity in the Philippines (in 2021) will be a preparation for 2033.



See here the video with Edith de Jesus : <https://jc2033.org/en/news/blog/201-philippines2018>

Moscow: thinking about how we can be together

During our visits to the leaders of the various churches in Moscow, we were invited to share a meal



with the *Focolare* community, made up of Catholics and Orthodox. *Marcel Olejar*, who is originally from Slovakia, notes that the communist ideology has cut all the roots in Russia, much more so than in his own country.

Miguel, who is of Mexican origin, has met several people who have recently discovered Christ, which is something new for him. "Yes, there is a great need to make him known. Your project stimulates us to walk, pray and work together, as Pope Francis calls us to do".

At the parish of Saints Como and Damian, we meet Father *Ioann (or Giovanni) Guaita*, rector of this lively parish, which is passing on the legacy of Alexander Men, a great figure of the Orthodox Church who was assassinated in 1990. Also a member of the *Focolare* movement, it is the dimension of Christian unity that appeals to him:

"One of Jesus' last prayers to his Father before his passion was that all may be one. Jesus didn't just pray for the apostles, but for those who would believe in his words, so for all Christians. I think it's essential to learn to be together, as we approach the two thousandth anniversary of Jesus' death and resurrection. This initiative therefore seems to me to be a useful way for Christians from different Churches to reflect on how to be together".



Visits to Moscow: <https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/241-russia-2018>

Cairo: the circle of unity has grown.



We prepared the visits to the churches in this huge city with Sherin Helmy, a Coptic Orthodox "*focolarina*". With her, I participate in an international theological reflection group of the movement (the study group on ecumenical theology of the "Abba School"). We meet every month on Skype, on the internet and once a year in person.

At both the beginning and the end of our stay (March 2019) we met with the *Focolare* community, first with

members of the communities and then with friends of the movement. Also taking part in the second

meeting were members of the Chemin Neuf Community, the Charismatic Renewal, and an evangelical church.

On the first evening, Magdi Mishraky, a Coptic-Orthodox member of the men Focolare, explained the relations between the churches: *"Some bishops and leaders are open, while others withdraw into their own churches. In January, we have the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It's great to pray together, but few people take part. What happens afterwards? We need to work on charity between Churches, so that Christians can meet and help each other. This is particularly important with the Evangelicals and Pentecostals, who are growing more and more"*.

On the last evening, Nelly Khadige, head of the women's community, who has attended several of our meetings, told us: *"The first step is to get to know each other. Your visits have created a friendship. You are now leaving with the Church of Egypt in your hearts. We have experienced some exceptional days with Christ in our midst. The circle of unity has grown. We will continue together."*

I think it was a fine conclusion to this astonishing and intense visit to this land that the Lord trod as an emigrant over 2,000 years ago. The seed sown in its soil is already bearing fruit, as we shall see in the following lines.

With pope Tawadros: "Building relationships".

Among the fifteen or so visits we made, the one with Pope Tawadros, Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church, was a highlight. At his residence in Cairo on 25 March 2019, Olivier Fleury and I were able to talk to him about the vision of a "decade of resurrection" to prepare for the Jubilee of 2033, and our Focolare friends were able to present their activities to him. It was the first time they had been received in a private audience.

Olivier asked him: *"How can the churches be together on this occasion? After all, 2000 years is something to celebrate. And we're celebrating together!"*

To this question, the Pope replied that the Egyptian Council of Churches should reflect on the matter. A special commission should also be set up to make concrete proposals.

About the problem of the different dates of Easter between the Orthodox and the other Churches, Tawadros has written a letter to Pope Francis proposing that they be unified. Research has also been carried out by the Churches. But for the moment there are no results.



On the other hand, he invites us to think about how we can experience Easter together in the years before 2033 (in 2025, 2028 and 2031) when the date will be common.

Audience with pope Tawadros with the Focolare movement

For him, the unity of the Churches must be centred on Christ. To explain this, he shows us his cross with its four branches. The bottom branch represents relationships; it is the longest, and therefore the most important. The second represents study, the third dialogue and the fourth prayer.

"It is only by holding these four branches together that we will reach the heart of Jesus and experience the unity of all Christians. We made the mistake of starting dialogue without studying and building relationships in love. We have to start building relationships with all the Churches, without exception", he says.

At the end of the meeting, he gave each person present a Coptic icon of the holy family, Mary and Jesus on a donkey led by Joseph fleeing to Egypt, and invited us to pray for Egypt.

About visits to Cairo: <https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/287-meeting-with-pope-tawadros-head-of-the-coptic-orthodox-church>

<https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/327-egyptian-chronicles>



Second visit to pope Tawadros with members of the Focolare movement, in December 2020

The ecumenical gathering at Anafora

The Focolare community in Cairo has played an essential role in the preparation and running of the meeting in Anafora (September 2021), a beautiful monastery in the Wadi Natroun region, about a hundred kilometres from Cairo.

Sherin Helmy was a member of the preparatory committee. The whole community took part and members of the movement also came from Lebanon and Cyprus.



During this gathering, using Paul's letter to the Corinthians as a starting point, I tried to show that the Cross and Resurrection of Christ are at the heart of the Christian faith and, therefore, the key to Christian unity. I was inspired by Paul's call to a divided community to "*know nothing else but Jesus Christ - Jesus Christ crucified*" (1 Cor 2:2), which is at the heart of the Focolare Movement's spirituality of unity and is still relevant today:

"The key to unity is to live the humility of Jesus, which is the characteristic of his love. His will is to infuse his humility into our hearts. He gives us his Spirit to make us workers for truth and justice. The fruit of his work in our lives is peace and unity in the community".

Read my talk here : <https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/537-the-key-to-unity.html>

Unity through friendship



"Unity, witness and celebration" are the three "values" of JC2033. Paul Thompson, head of communications at JC2033 explains: "*We relate to these core values in different ways and it becomes interesting to discuss them. In any case, we have to look to Jesus, who embodies them perfectly.*"

Some personal accounts then illustrate these three values. For unity, the floor is given to the Focolare Movement. *Bernhard Roesch*, a member of the Cairo community of German origin, shares his experience of friendship with refugees in Berlin. As many of the refugees came from Egypt, the Berlin Focolare community got in touch with the Coptic priest there. This meeting changed the lives of the participants, and the friendship continues until now.

A member of the Focolare community in Lebanon also shares how important unity between Christians is in the very difficult times his country is going through.

In Anafora's astonishing amphitheatre, 250 participants gathered for a festive meal followed by a final celebration. Testimonies from participants from four continents - Colombia, Russia, India, Tanzania and Egypt.



"From Egypt I called my son". Sherin Helmy quotes these words from Matthew's Gospel. She sees it as a call to the participants in the Anafora meeting:

"From this blessed place of Anafora in Egypt," she says, "the Lord calls us as sons and daughters, just as he called Jesus his beloved Son, to reach out to our contemporaries, whoever they may be. The Risen Lord sends us out, but he does not leave us alone. He gives us the promise that concludes the Gospel: "And I am with you always, until the end of time" (Mat 28:29.

Read Sherin's talk here: <https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/523-and-i-am-with-you-anafora-program-2021.html>

The risen Jesus in our midst is the presence of God that brings us together. We have experienced this during these days. His presence transforms us and guides us towards a city where justice reigns, where human relationships are based on truth, where friendship is lived out and where we can recognise and love one another.



On the [Anafora](#) gathering:

<https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/535-global-gathering-2021-anafora>

Rima Saikali, from the focolare community of Cairo, was a « master of ceremony » during this gathering

Paris: Building relationships.



During our stay in Paris in June 2019, we visited the "Domaine d'Arny", a meeting centre for the Focolare, who have invited around fifty people from the surrounding parishes. *"It's a crazy but meaningful project. Weaving links between fragmented churches is a message of hope,"* says Marithé Vuignier, the person in charge of the centre.

A priest from Cameroon, passing through Europe, thanks the Lord for having brought him here: *"Your testimony,"* he told Olivier, *"touched my heart. I know that when the Lord calls, he provides all the means to make the project a reality".*

One person asked patients in a hospital room what the year 2033 meant. He was surprised that, rapidly, the discussion became profound.

"We continue to ask the Spirit for this magnificent project that has become ours", Christiane wrote to me after the meeting.

Visits to Paris: <https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/376-chronicles-of-paris>

Munich: what next after the Reformation Jubilee?

In November of the same year, I made several visits to Munich (Germany). One evening I was invited to the Women Focolare, where around twenty members of this movement with broad horizons and a strong commitment to ecumenism welcomed me for a time of eating and sharing.



Andrea Fleming recalls that one of the fruits of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, in 2017, was a path of reconciliation. It was not just a Protestant jubilee. The challenge now is to understand what the next step will be. Could it be a pilgrimage to 2033?

Having contacted her to prepare for my visits, she was amazed that I was able to contact so many people in such a simple and open way. She's waiting to see what doors the Holy Spirit opens.

For her, it's a sign of authenticity. I often say to myself: "*It's the Holy Spirit who opens the doors*", and I've experienced it!

What fascinates *Marlies Rueschoff* is the global vision of JC2033: it is not confined to Germany or any other country but is lived out with all Christians.

The vision is easy to understand: to celebrate 2,000 years since the Resurrection and to be reconciled on the path that leads to it. However, after the Jubilee of the Reformation, there is a certain fatigue and, at times, a certain disappointment. We need to get back on track. Will we have the strength?

Visits to Munich: <https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/393-chronicles-of-munich>

Oslo: An "Emmaus route" to 2033



With the Focolare of Oslo and some volunteers

"Welcome to Portugal", says Antonio Quinteiro, the ambassador of Portugal, as he opens the door to the "Portuguese house" where I'll be staying for the next few days in Oslo. Olivier Fleury will be joining me for the last night.

A volunteer with the Focolare Movement, my generous host welcomed me with great fraternity and led me, for the first evening, to the local community.

The evening began with a meditation. I chose to discuss the road to Emmaus, on which I had just walked with around thirty people, and to make the link between this story, the presence of the Risen Lord among us and the journey towards 2033.

"The Emmaus story is one of the most beautiful texts. I love the disciples' surprise and Jesus' unusual way of entering their lives. The disciples were desperate. This story also tells me how important it is to share my difficulties, and not just my successes. And to be open to others who can help me along the way", echoes Elma.

She was moved by Olivier Fleury's vision: the people of God from every place and every church coming together to celebrate 2,000 years since the resurrection of Jesus. It is so important that such a project should start from the grassroots, and not just from the authorities. She will be praying that we meet people who have the grace to understand this project. *"This celebration must begin today within me,"* she says.

Roy, a Filipino, was touched by the disciples' joy. An even greater joy than the one he has just experienced after finding his forgotten cell phone on a bus!

Anita, from Sweden said, it is good to take time to invite guests to this celebration. How will the churches be in 2033? The Church of the future will be much more modest: small communities where people see the joy of the Gospel.

Concerning the division between the Orthodox Church and the other Churches over the date of Easter, she welcomes our call to celebrate Easter on a common date in 2033 and remembers that an Orthodox friend had told her that he did not allow the moon to decide our unity!

As for Antonio, my host ambassador, he pointed out that "Focolare" means fire in Italian. Fire is another word for the Holy Spirit. However, at Emmaus, the hearts of the disciples were burning. But to share in this fire, namely the presence of Christ in us and in our midst, we have to lose our selfish self. We are the fuel: our "old man" must burn.

For Anne, who comes from Holland, the discovery of the presence of the Risen One among us was very important for her faith. She is delighted that many people will discover Jesus through our initiative.

She wonders how to reach the Norwegians, because at Easter they are more on the ski slopes than in the churches. In Oslo, it is even said that there are, at this time of the year, only Catholics who do not know how to ski, the majority coming from Poland, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. It is a very secularized society, certainly spiritual but not religious.

Visits to Oslo: <https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/418-chronicles-of-oslo>

Montet: "Be Always a family"!

In January 2022, *Sandra Ferreira Ribeiro* and *Enno Djikema*, the two new co-directors of Centro Uno (the centre for Christian unity), came to Montet-Broye (Switzerland), home to an international centre of the Focolare Movement.

Olivier Fleury and I took the opportunity to visit them. The meeting was also attended by *Joan Pavi Back*, former head of the Centro Uno, and *Werner Peier*, focolarino of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Switzerland.

It was a fruitful meeting. Firstly because it was joyful, and secondly because it enabled us to connect with each other at the world centre of the Focolare Movement.



I love this photo taken in front of a photo of Chiara, with her invitation to "always be family". Yes, by his resurrection Jesus made us brothers and sisters, children of the same Father, members of the same family!

Read my meditation on "Resurrection and fraternity": <https://martin.hoeqger.org/spiritualite/647-resurrection-fraternite-et-sacrement-2>

Bogota: "synodal path"

In March 2022 a delegation from JC2033 visited the leaders of the churches in Colombia in preparation for the next meeting, which will take place in March 2023 in Cartagena, in the north of this great country. The meeting with the Focolares of Bogota was very cordial. The JC2033 ambassador from Colombia, Daniel Castro, was very touched by this welcome. He himself is the director of the Youth With A Mission Centre for Colombia. It's wonderful that this great Pentecostal movement is collaborating with the Focolare Movement.



Two meetings stand out in my mind: one with Susanna Nuin, focolarina and director of the Centre for Biblical and Pastoral Theology for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEBITEPAL) and Bishop Rodolfo Valenzuela, president of the ecumenical commission of the Council of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM). He assured us of his support and the commitment of the Catholic Church:

"The Catholic Church," he told us, "is in the process of living a 'synodal journey'

that corresponds to what you are proposing. What's interesting is the process: listening to each other with respect, remembering our fundamental identity in faith in Christ who died and rose again".

He pointed out that CELAM had already given some thought to the year 2033. Of course, the initiative of preparing it together is better and he likes the idea of an ecumenical pilgrimage towards Easter 2033. He believes that the JC2033 proposal is in line with what CELAM is looking for, namely a space where Catholics can meet Christians from other Churches, in particular Evangelicals and Pentecostals.

Susana Nuin told us: *"We are open to helping you and to walking together. I think the proposal is very interesting. It's one of the many ways we can walk together"*. She suggested that we think about a training programme.

A member of the Vatican's *Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity*, Mgr Valenzuela adds that members of other Churches are also invited to reflect on the synodal process. Pope Francis insists on our fundamental identity in Baptism, which has great ecumenical significance. He invites us to share our initiative in a forthcoming seminar organised by CELAM. For our part, we invite him to take part in the Cartagena meeting.

Focolari of Latin America: a call to be taken seriously!

On June 11. 2022, a video conference was organised by one of the leaders of the Focolare Movement in Colombia, Yaco Pecora. He invited around fifty people - mostly Catholics - from 33 connection points in 10 Latin American countries, most of whom were responsible for the Movement's ecumenical relations.

"It's a message that comes directly from Jesus. A call that must be taken very seriously. May the desire for unity between us grow! That will be my dream for the next few years", said Bishop Ubaldo Santana from Venezuela.



50 people of the Focolari involved in ecumenism, from 15 Latin American countries.

I remember the smiles on the faces of those who took part in this unforgettable "Zoom". *This project of unity and life is excellent*," said Abouna Georges, a priest of Syrian origin. *"Let's prepare a great gift for Jesus in 2033... namely intercommunion!"*

After this meeting, the leaders of the Latin American Zone Centre reflected on the involvement of the Focolare Movement in the preparations for 2033. They decided to invite the Churches to organise an annual ecumenical gathering in a different Latin American country until 2033. In 2024, it will take place in Venezuela, after the one in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, in March 2023.

Cartagena gathering, March 2023.

The collaboration with the Focolari of Colombia has been remarkable in preparing this memorable gathering. Without them, it would not have been possible to have such a profound encounter between the Catholic Church and the other Churches, in particular the Evangelicals and Pentecostals.

At every stage of the preparations, they provided their smiling and thoughtful collaboration. In addition, the fact that the meeting was taking place at the Youth With A Mission centre in Cartagena also led to a wonderful collaboration between the Focolari and this great Pentecostal movement, as illustrated by the photo below.

And providentially, the JC2033 meeting coincided with the opening of the Cartagena Women's Focolare!



The "Masters of Ceremonies" of the Gathering: Maria-Angelica Ferrero (Youth With A Mission) and Yaco Pecora (Focolare Movement)

Witness through relationships

I'm not going to go into detail about the various stages of this gathering, but I would like to recount two moments. **Maria Elizabeth Mendoza**, a volunteer of the Focolare Movement, recounts the experience of young women during the 2nd World War who put God first in their lives and who gave rise to the Focolare Movement. By making a "pact of mutual love", they realized that Jesus was among them, according to his promise: "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mat 18:20).



She is accompanied by **Tatiana**, who shares how she was touched by the love of Jesus through her friendships in a youth group. A group that is also committed to practical action among the local people.

Keila (Youth with Mission) and Tatiana (Focolari)

Ardita's dream!

Ardita Rivera, co-leader of the Focolare Movement in Colombia, thanks the organisers for sharing their dream which became hers. The young people of YWAM gave her deep joy: *'You are the face of Samuel, God called you and you followed him. Your testimony is edifying'*.

Reflecting on the theme of the banquet, it seems to her that Jesus is preparing a great banquet for all of us, but open to all humanity: *"I dream that in the next ten years we will reach many people,*

believers and non-believers, from our churches and outside, from different cultures and religions, and that through sincere friendship we will be able to make them experience the love of a Father.

May this spring become a great river!

Francisco Munera, Archbishop of Cartagena, expressed his joy at having been able to collaborate in this gathering to begin "a journey to Emmaus" with members of different churches and movements. *"This experience allows us to widen our hearts: overcoming barriers and judgements, knowing and*

loving each other in order to serve, thanks to the presence of the risen Jesus Christ at the centre of our lives.



Archbishop Francisco Munera of Cartagena with the Focolari of Colombia, and with Olivier Fleury and Martin Hoegger.

He also expressed the gratitude of the Colombian Bishops' Conference and the Latin American Council of Archbishops (CELAM). He hopes that this experience will be extended to the whole Latin American continent. *"May this source that starts in Cartagena become a great river! May we become true missionary disciples of Jesus,"* he concludes!



Olivier Fleury (centre), surrounded by Josué (Youth With A Mission) and Raffaele (Focolare) to pass on the torch for the next gathering in Latin America, which will take place in Venezuela.

United States of America, June 2022

On the campus of Georgetown University, Amy Uelmen and Carlos Bajo welcome us in the law school. Both are leaders of the Focolari in the USA. Amy teaches intercultural and interreligious dialogue and Carlos is committed to fostering dialogue among people involved in political life. A good

part of the interview is about this "art of dialogue" in a very polarized society. How is it possible to continue living together?

Since Martin also reflected on the relationship between dialogue and witness following the Anafora gathering, Amy agreed to reread the text he wrote on this topic. She made several helpful suggestions to him. (See his text here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1POKjFw9_B0i6L-vyDCpiEQayv13E7RII/edit)

Catholic - Evangelical/Pentecostal dialogue

Through our relations with the Focolare Movement, we have been able to meet other movements interested in developing links with us. Beautiful relationships between Christians are being lived out, particularly with the evangelical-pentecostal movement, as we are also seeking to live them out within the framework of JC2033.

"John 17 movement"

In Phoenix we meet Patrick Markey and Fritz Zuger, also two members of the Focolare. Both have worked for many years for the Bishops' Conference in the international aid service. Fritz is Swiss and has lived in the USA for many years. His work is to help in the relationships between the Bishops' Conference in the US and the Bishops' Conferences in Africa.

Both are connected to the **John 17** movement and Pat is a member of its Board of Directors. The John 17 Movement is dedicated to building unity in the Body of Christ through relationships that bring healing and reconciliation. Pat explains that "*it was the Holy Spirit that drew bishops, pastors, and movements like the Focolare to this initiative.*" <https://john17movement.com/>



O. Fleury, F. Zuger, D. Gonvers and P. Markey

« The Initiative »

This is another movement where Christians from different churches meet. Tom Masters and Greg Metzger, who are also connected to the Focolare, testify to what they experience there. The Initiative emerged from the experience of John Armstrong, an Evangelical minister, who was "*struck by the passage of John 17:21 on unity.*" Upon his retirement from active ministry, his board of advisors discerned that his work—which he calls "missional ecumenism"—should continue in an intentional community. The executive director is Scott Brill, a Lutheran. The aim of The Initiative is for members to pray, to work proactively for missional ecumenism, and to share their lives with

Christians from traditions other than their own. Those who participate commit to *"take the initiative to live in deep and growing friendship with God and others, so that the love of Jesus may overcome all divisions."*

It is a spiritual ecumenism where the emphasis is on relationships. *"I see it as a way of living my vocation as a member of the Focolare, of inculturating the spirituality of the Focolare (which developed within an Italian Catholic milieu) in a culture that is fundamentally Protestant,"* says Tom. <https://theinitiative.org>

With the Bishops' Conference



We were received by the US Bishop Conference five months later, on October 21, by videoconference. We shared our experience and our reflections for fifteen minutes. At a distance of 6,500 kilometres from Washington and via the Internet, it is difficult to get an idea of the reaction of the bishops. Especially since there was no dialogue after our presentation.

An email from Walter Kedjierski, executive director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the Bishops' Conference, arrived sometime later that made us think that this meeting had touched hearts: *"The bishops were absolutely delighted with your visit. They enjoyed hearing from you. As I expected, you both did a perfect job. The enthusiasm you have for the Lord comes across very well on the screen,"* he writes.

The bishops particularly liked the idea of the walk - or pilgrimage - to 2033. They want all the U.S. bishops to be contacted to remind them of the importance of being ecumenically inclusive in preparing for the 2000^e anniversary of the resurrection. They want to stay in touch and be inspired by our experiences.

What a small world!

The day after this meeting, I took part in a meeting of the Focolare Movement in Geneva. One of the members of the Focolare, Christian Muggler, told me that he had heard what had happened at the Bishops' Conference. Christian is in fact part of a team that prepares meetings between bishops and friends of the movement. And it was one of the bishops who took part in these meetings who immediately informed him of our visit. What a small world!

The following week we received a beautiful letter from Bishop David P. Talley, Bishop of Memphis and Chairman of the Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. He's that bishop, a member of the Focolare, that Christian told me about! *"The Commission was very interested in discerning ways to work with you to make this a truly ecumenical celebration,"* he writes.

He is also particularly interested in how others plan to *"walk in pilgrimage"* to 2033 in an ecumenical way and concludes: *"Let us pray for each other and for the success of the ecumenical movement. May the resurrection of Christ bring us all together in Jesus Christ."*

On the visits in the USA : <https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/655-jc2033-and-the-catholic-church-in-the-united-state>

Sweden: "receptive ecumenism »



At the end of June 2022, I took part in the 5^e congress on "*receptive ecumenism*" in Sigtuna, Sweden. It was an opportunity to familiarise myself with a new and fruitful approach that invites the churches to recognise their vulnerability. Each church is invited to ask itself not only what it can give to others, but first of all what it can receive from them.

During my stay, I was also able to meet the leaders of the Swedish Council of Churches and lay the foundations for a future visit to present JC2033. Perhaps on the occasion of the 100^e anniversary of the Stockholm Conference of 1925, an important moment in the ecumenical journey?

I actually found out about this conference thanks to the Ecumenical Theology Group of the Abba School.

It enabled a number of people to meet "in real life": Pavi Back, the leader of this group, Callan Slipper, an Anglican theologian, Anna Tronet, a Lutheran theologian and Nausikaa Haupt, a Catholic member of the committee of the Swedish Council of Churches.

Karlsruhe: World Assembly of the Ecumenical Council

Together with Katharina Dang, JC2033 ambassador in Germany, Olivier Fleury and I held a stand to present JC2033 at the beginning of September 2022.

Under a tent, we tried to make it more convivial by putting inflatable armchairs and offering coffee... and Swiss chocolate. In all, we were able to welcome or contact around a hundred people from all ecclesial and cultural backgrounds.

We met our immediate neighbours: a stand run by the World Communion of Reformed Churches and an Indian stand promoting justice for the Dalits. Not far from us were also the stands of our friends from the Global Christian Forum and the Focolare Movement, with whom we had several interactions.





A meeting centred on Christ in our midst.

"Christ's love leads the world to reconciliation and unity" was the theme of this assembly. We really enjoyed putting Christ at the heart of this meeting. Isn't that what we want to do with JC2033: put the Risen Christ at the centre of our journey together towards 2033? And to give him all the room in the world! Isn't this also a cardinal point of the spirituality of unity: the presence of Jesus in our midst! It seems to me that in Karlsruhe we experienced a spiritual unity... in great diversity. Above all, it's his work; he has acted among us!

Olav Tveit, the former general secretary of the WCC, proposed this theme. And he sees the influence of the "spirituality of communion" in the choice of this theme, which emphasises the importance of relationships.¹ This theme inspired Agnès Abouom, the moderator of the WCC central committee, to use the expression "ecumenism of the heart".

You can also read about this meeting here: <https://jc2033.org/en/news/blog/631-jc2033-at-the-general-assembly-of-the-world-council-of-churches-some-experiences-and-lessons.html>

Together for Europe and Easter 2025

We have taken part on several occasions in this network of European movements, in which the Focolare Movement is a major player. I was able to share the vision of JC2033 with several movements. In Switzerland, in 2018, at a meeting of around twenty communities and movements as part of *"Together on the way"*, the Swiss network of movements, of which I am a member.

¹ It is interesting to note that O. Tveit wrote in the epilogue to Chiara Lubich's book, *My ecumenical journey* (New City 2020, p. 127): "It may well be that it was under the influence of Chiara (Lubich) and her charism for Christian unity that the WCC was inspired to choose the theme of the 11^e assembly..."

On several occasions, I've seen how communities and movements are motivated to join this "march towards 2033". Maria Wienken and Diego Goller, who are members of the European Committee and represent the Focolare Movement, are friends of JC2033.

In October 2022, they invited us to join an initiative to invite the Churches to come together for Easter 2025, when the date will be common to all Christians. This year will also mark the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which defined the Christian faith and the calculation of the date of Easter. This jubilee will be an opportunity to revive the question of the date of Easter, which still divides Christians and to highlight Easter (and the resurrection of Christ) as the core of Christian Faith

The meeting brought together leaders of Together for Europe, the Focolare Movement and an Orthodox movement, the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy.



At the "Zoom" meeting on 4 October 2022, Olivier Fleury said he was delighted by this initiative and pledged his support. He invited us to underline the importance of young people and of the Churches of the South. And, above all, that we should not come together just for ourselves, among Christians, but "so that the world may know" (John 17:21).

I particularly remember the image of the "caravan" shared by Thomas Römer, one of the leaders of the Young men Christian Association (YMCA) in Germany. "A caravan crosses the desert. In many places in Europe, there is a desert of faith. We want to celebrate the Risen Lord together at Easter 2025, so that he can renew the earth. It's a wonderful opportunity to bear witness to the fact that Jesus is alive and has the power to transform us", he said.

I was pleased and interested to take part in the Zoom meeting. It's a wonderful initiative, which no doubt stems from Jesus' desire to see his Church gathered around his resurrection and to be the light of the world.

The image of the "caravan" spoke to me a lot. We are on a journey, a pilgrimage. During that Zoom, I added that this caravan should not stop at Easter 2025. It must continue, keeping in mind the horizon of Easter 2033. And also to mark the common dates of Easter in 2028 and 2031!

May the Churches give a "decisive sign of unity" during this year, as J. Moran once said to me. From 13 to 15 December, this group will be meeting at the Theological Academy of Crete and JC2033 will be taking part. Easter 2025 will undoubtedly be an important stage in this "pilgrimage of reconciliation" leading us towards 2033.

"Easter Together 2025", an important step to 2033. Creta, December 2022



A joint initiative of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, the Focolari's "Centro Uno", Together for Europe, Center of Ecumenical, Missiological and Environmental Studies "Metropolitan Panteleimon Papageorgiou" (CEMES), JC 2033 and the Orthodox Academy of Crete (OAC).

The initiative "Easter Together 2025" focuses on the decisions of the Council of Nicaea, with, first of all, a call to find unity around the date of Easter. It also calls for a common vision to witness to the Resurrection of Jesus, as the Council of Nicaea defined the Christian Faith by placing the Resurrection of Christ at its centre.

In fact, the importance of having the same date for the celebration of Easter can only be understood after understanding the centrality of Jesus' Resurrection for the Christian Faith. Hence the importance of understanding the scope of the Council of Nicaea and deepening its statements 1700 years ago.

This was the theme of a meeting at the Orthodox Academy of Crete, in Kolymbari, in the far west of this large Greek island, where I took part. About twenty people from various Churches and Movements met there from 13th to 15th December 2022.

We called this initiative "Pasqua Together 2025" (Easter Together 2025). "Pasqua", the Greek word for Easter, comes from the Hebrew "Pesah" meaning "passage" and evokes the crossing of the Red Sea by the Hebrews and the passage from death to life of Jesus Christ.

On "Pasqua Together 2025", see: <https://jc2033.org/en/news/blog/653-easter-together-2025-an-important-step-to-2033>

Commemorating the Council of Nicaea: the beginning of a new start?



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 info.pasqua@together2025.org

Pasqua Together 2025 organised an online seminar on 8 February 2024, offering perspectives and reflections on the Council of Nicaea. What is its legacy for Christians today? The seminar attracted more than 500 participants. I contributed a Protestant reflection on the Nicene Creed.

See <https://www.hoegger.org/article/commemorer-le-concile-de-nicee-le-debut-dun-nouveau-depart/>

Visits to leaders

In September 2024, we participated in a delegation of various movements, including the Focolare Movement, gathered together in the initiative 'Easter Together 2025', for [two memorable visits: to Pope Francis, preceded by a visit to Patriarch Bartholomew](#). What brought us together was the desire to bear witness to the same faith in the risen Christ on the occasion of the common date of Easter in 2025 and to call on Christians to overcome their divisions around this date. Similarly, a delegation from



'Pasqua Together 2025' visited the [World Council of Churches \(WCC\) in February 2025](#), during the JC2033 international gathering in Geneva. Jerry Pillay, the general secretary, received them at his offices.

Together towards 2033 to celebrate Jesus Christ!



Charis, the International Service of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, invited a group of prominent figures committed to the journey towards 2033. Olivier Fleury and I took part in this meeting on 3 November 2023 in the Church of St. Anne, at the entrance to the Vatican. The Focolare Movement was one of the guests.

Enno Dijkema, advisor for ecumenical relations, explains that the Focolare Movement is involved in several ways, particularly with JC2033, with whom a cooperation and friendship has developed. He sees the contribution of this movement not only in witnessing to the risen Lord, which is the mission of the whole Church, but also in 'contributing with all of you to ensuring that the Risen One lives more and more in us and especially among us. So that, on the road to 2033, we may, as Christians, bear ever greater witness, in unity, to Him and to His Resurrection, not only with words, but above all through the experience of His presence in our midst. May people 'see' and experience that He is risen!'

Read here: <https://www.jc2033.world/fr/blog/ensemble-vers-2033-pour-celebrer-jesus-christ-736.html>

World Christian Forum: Accra, Ghana, April 2024



Martin Hoegger with members of the Focolare Movement

Olivier Fleury and Martin Hoegger were invited to participate in the fourth gathering of the World Christian Forum (WCF) held in Accra, Ghana, in April 2024. On this occasion, many contacts were made with leaders of churches and movements. The vision of a common witness for the 2000th anniversary of Christ's resurrection was communicated.

The Focolare Movement was represented by Enno Dijkema, co-director of the Movement's Ecumenical Centre (Centro Uno). It is worth noting that among the many movements represented at this meeting, only two were able to speak in the plenary session: the Focolare Movement and...JC2033!

See: <https://www.jc2033.world/en/blog/global-christian-forum-a-story-of-unity-and-witness-806.html>

Togo, first visit to French-speaking Africa



After Ghana, we travelled to Togo, where we visited several churches and movements. In particular, we had an excellent meeting with the leaders of the Focolare Movement, Patricia Massan, co-leader of the local community with Ambroise Tolema. The leader of Youth Mission in Togo, Fofonè Tengue, also participated in this meeting. It seemed to us that God had lit a spark between these two movements, so great was the joy of the encounter! May it ignite all of Africa for 2033!

With members of the Focolare Movement and Youth Mission

See: <https://www.jc2033.world/en/blog/togo-first-visit-to-french-speaking-africa-811.html>

Avanti!



I took part in an interfaith conference in the spirit of the Focolare Movement from 30 May to 4 June 2024. During those days, seeds of fraternity were sown! In a 'time of divisions, dialogue counts' was the motto of those days.

On 3 June, Pope Francis received us in private audience. After his speech, he generously gave his time to greet each participant personally. I was able to tell him that I am a pastor in the Reformed Church and a volunteer with the Focolare Movement, active in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. When I also told him that I am involved in the JC2033 initiative, he gave me a big smile and said, 'Avanti!'

At the end of the next meeting with Pope Francis, in September 2024, as part of 'Easter Together 2025,' I was able to greet him personally. I told him that we were praying for him and for the journey from 2025 to 2033, and that all Christians would be able to celebrate the resurrection of Christ together at Easter 2033 and bear witness to it!

He replied: *‘Adiamo avanti, sono d'accordo.’ ‘Let's move forward, I agree!’*

See: <https://europeantimes.news/2024/06/one-human-family-new-paths-for-dialogue/>

Testimonies of the Focolares at the JC2033 international gathering in Geneva, 28 February 2025



The two Focolare communities in Geneva gave a testimony of their life of unity during this meeting, which brought together 250 people from 35 countries. Here is an excerpt:

‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them’ (Matthew 18:20). With our limitations and shortcomings, we seek to make Christ's promised presence effective around us through mutual love, expressed in small or large

gestures and frequent new beginnings.

In this way, networks of relationships are woven where love circulates, allowing God to manifest himself through closeness and capillarity. We are spurred on by the Word of God, received, chewed over and put into practice (James 1:22), and we are witnesses to its effectiveness through its fruits which, when shared, create community. As our founder Chiara Lubich said, it is a way of tracing “paths of light and sharing with everyone shame, hunger, blows and brief joys”.²

See: <https://www.jc2033.world/en/blog/jc2033-world-gathering-a-look-back-in-pictures-1056.html>

‘Called to Hope – Key Players in Dialogue.’ A conference of the Focolare Movement

In March 2025, I took part in the conference ‘Called to Hope’ in Castel Gandolfo, in the hills above Rome: *‘In these times of division and great challenges, as Christians we are called to bear witness together to the hope of the Gospel and to be actors of dialogue and unity, committing ourselves to peace and fraternity.’*

Read here various articles I wrote about this congress: <https://www.hoegger.org/article/called-to-hope-key-players-in-dialogue/>

² Chiara Lubich, *Rivista Città Nuova*, 12 November 1958

I was accompanied by Enno Djikema, co-director of Centro Uno, and Gerhard Pross, moderator of Together for Europe.



This congress brought together 250 participants from 40 countries and 20 different churches. Among them were twelve bishops from various churches. In addition, the streaming was broadcast in 20 countries.

I gave a presentation on JC2033. After this, members of the movement from various countries expressed interest in becoming 'ambassadors' for JC2033.

Read it here: <https://www.hoegger.org/article/jc2033-in-brief/>

Martin Hoegger – mhoegger@jc2033.world - Le Mont sur Lausanne, 1 April 2025